retiring after 1st April, 2003. A concession has been made in respect of retirees prior to 31st March, 2003 who can pay their contribution in three consecutive, equal yearly installments.

(ii) War widows and disabled war veterans have been exempted from payment of contribution for ECHS membership.

(iii) the scheme envisages setting up of 227 ECHS polyclinics in 104 military and 123 non-military stations to be set up by 31st March, 2008.

(iv) Besides, there is a provision for empanelling private/civil hospitals and diagnostic centres where patients can be referred by polyclinics. 519 such hospitals/diagnostics centres have so far been empanelled under the scheme. In addition, the members can be referred to any Central or State Government hospital.

(c) The scheme provides for reimbursement of diagnostic and treatment cost to empanelled private hospitals/diagnostic centres as per the rates approved by CGHS for all ailments including cancer, by-pass surgery, renal transplantation, joint replacement etc. which are very costly. After treatment of ECHS patients in empanelled civil facilities, bills are submitted to the concerned ECHS Polyclinic. These are then subjected to multi level checking and final approval is accorded by the Competent Financial Authority (CFA). Any excess charges are deducted. Final payment is made to the hospital by the concerned Station Commander. Submission of bills and making of payment is a continuous process.

Defence Agreement with USA

899. SHRI C. RAMACHANDRAIAH: Will the Minister of DEFENCE be pleased to state:

(a) whether India has entered into a defence agreement with USA;

(b) if so, whether the present treaty with USA is likely to affect the defence agreement with Russia; and

(c) if so, the strategy chalked out by Government to keep balance of defence trade and co-operation and strategic agreement intact with both countries?

THE MINISTER OF DEFENCE (SHRI PRANAB MUKHERJEE): (a) Yes, Sir. A document entitled 'New Framework for the US-India Defence Relationship' was signed on June 28, 2005 during Raksha Mantri

(Pranab Mukherjee's) official visit to the US from June 27—30, 2005. The document includes provisions for co-operation to enhance the capabilities of the US and Indian armed forces to deal with terrorism, disasters and the spread of Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD); expand defence trade, production and technology relationship with the US; and promote regional and global peace and stability; jointly or with others through expanded interaction with other nations.

(b) and (c) The New Framework document will not affect India's defence arrangements/agreements with Russia or any other country.

Defective Barrels used in T 72 tanks

900. SHRI TARIQ ANWAR: Will the Minister of DEFENCE be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that some defective barrels had been used in T 72 tanks;

(b) if so, the details thereof;

(c) the number of accidents which occurred due to this during the last three years; and

(d) the steps Government are taking in this regard?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF DEFENCE (SHRI RAO INDERJIT SINGH): (a) and (b) T-72 barrels are being produced under license according to the technical specifications and guidelines provided by the Russian experts. All the barrels are tested and proof fired according to the specified quality standards, before issue to army. However, cases of barrels burst have been reported during exploitation of the T-72 tanks, involving both indigenous as well as imported barrels.

(c) During the last three years, 26 cases of burst (14 with imported barrels and 12 with indigenous barrels) have occurred.

(d) Cases of premature failure/barrel burst have been thoroughly investigated, and the opinion of Russian experts was also sought by Ministry of Defence. The suggested improvements in manufacturing process have been implemented. Some barrels, which are suspected to be defective were segregated and utilized for proof of ammunition only.